

**The Native American Women's  
Health Education Resource Center**

**Sudden  
Infant  
Death  
Syndrome**



**A Guide to  
Reducing the Risk**

## **What is SIDS?**

**Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)** is a medical term describing the sudden death of an infant which remains unexplained after all possible causes are ruled out by autopsy, death scene investigation, and review of medical history. SIDS is responsible for more deaths than any other cause for babies one month to one year of age. SIDS takes the lives of 7,000 babies each year. It strikes families from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds without warning. No one can predict that something is going wrong. In fact, most SIDS victims appear healthy prior to death.

## **What Causes SIDS?**

While there are still no definite explanations for SIDS, current medical theories include (1) stress in a normal baby, such as an infection; (2) a birth defect; (3) failure to develop; and/or (4) a critical period when all babies are very vulnerable, such as a time of rapid growth.

## **Can SIDS be Prevented?**

No, not totally. But some recent studies have identified several risk factors, which, though not necessarily the cause of SIDS, may play a role in some cases.

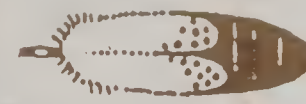






# Reducing the Risk for SIDS

## Some Steps for Parents



### **Place your baby on its back to sleep.**

- Placing healthy, full-term infants to sleep on their backs helps to reduce the risk of SIDS. This is very important during the first six months, when the risk is greatest. This recommendation does not apply to babies with breathing problems or excessive spitting up after feeding. Be sure to speak with a doctor about whether or not this recommendation is right for your baby.

### **Stop smoking around the baby.**

- SIDS is associated with women who smoke during pregnancy. Second hand smoke also puts newborn babies at risk for SIDS.

### **Use firm bedding materials.**

- Babies need to sleep on a firm, flat mattress in a safety approved crib. Parents should avoid putting infants to sleep on beanbag cushions, sheepskins, foam pads, and foam sofa cushions. Waterbeds should also be avoided.

### **Avoid overheating, especially when your baby is ill.**

- Overheating—too much clothing, too heavy bedding, and too warm a room, increases the risk of SIDS for a baby with a cold or infection. Signs that your baby may be overheated include sweating, damp hair, heat rash, rapid breathing, restlessness, and sometimes fever. To help your baby regulate his or her temperature, you should maintain a consistent indoor temperature (68-70 degrees Fahrenheit) and dress your baby in as much or as little as you would wear.

### **If possible, breast-feed your baby.**

- Studies show that babies who die of SIDS are less likely to have been breast-fed. Potential advantages to breast-feeding your baby include preventing gastrointestinal and respiratory illness, infections, and certain immunologic disorders.

### **What is a Risk factor?**

Risk factors do not themselves cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, but they can have a negative effect on infant well being. As many as two-thirds of SIDS victims have no known risk factors, and most babies with one or more of these risks will not become SIDS victims.

Therefore, while doctors are hopeful that the recommendations described here may reduce the risk of SIDS, following this advice will not prevent all SIDS deaths. Further research is needed to determine how and why SIDS occurs.

The sudden death of an infant leaves us with agonizing pain. Parents often blame themselves for the death, but **sudden infant death syndrome** is a natural event for which no one is to blame.

The following information is meant to provide parents with the latest medical evidence in the hope of giving your baby the best possible chance for health.





## **Some Basic Facts about SIDS:**

- SIDS is a medical condition and is the major cause of death in infants after the first month of life.
- SIDS takes the lives of about 7,000 babies in the United States each year-nearly one baby every hour of every day.
- SIDS victims appear healthy prior to death.
- Death occurs very rapidly, usually during sleep.

## **What SIDS is not:**

- SIDS is not caused by external suffocation.
- SIDS is not caused by vomiting and choking.
- SIDS is not contagious.

The Native American Women's Health  
Education Resource Center  
P.O. Box 572  
Lake Andes, South Dakota 57356  
(605) 487-7072

Prepared by M. Pent



